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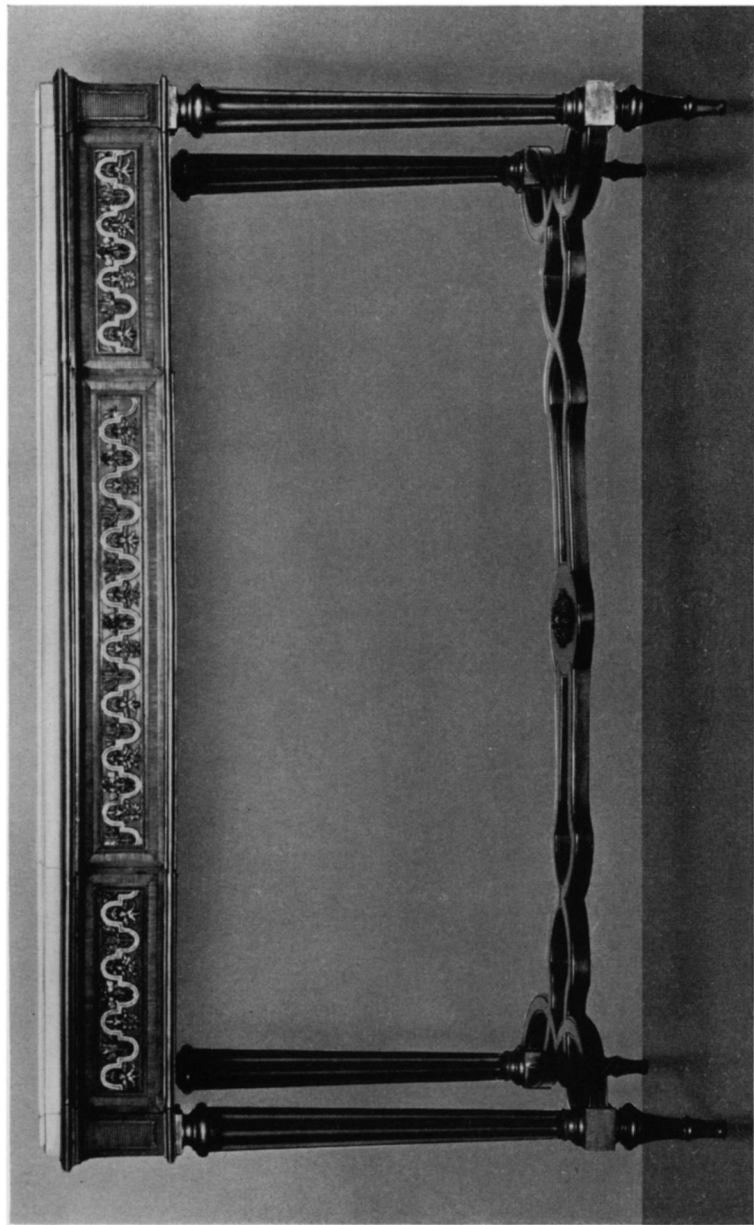
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CONSOLE, FRENCH LOUIS XVI PERIOD
Signed by Weisweiler
Anonymous Gift

THE BULLETIN OF THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

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NEW ACCESSIONS OF FRENCH FURNITURE

The Museum has recently received by anonymous gift a splendid console signed by Adam Weisweiler. The console has a most interesting provenance, having been for many years in the collection of Henry Deschamps. He inherited it from his grandfather, Jean Deschamps, to whom it had been presented by Her Royal Highness, the Duchess of Angoulême, daughter of Louis XVI. In addition, a charming coffret à mariage in the style of Jacob has been lately purchased from the Dudley P. Allen Fund. By these two acquisitions the Museum has added fine examples of French furniture of the Louis XVI period, up to this time unrepresented in the collections.

Scarcely ever in the history of art has pure craftsmanship reached such a level of sustained excellence as it did in France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Let it be painter, sculptor, architect, wood carver, landscape gardener, or furniture maker, each had carried his craft until it approached the ultimate in refinement and excellence of workmanship. To Louis XIV indirectly should go much of the credit for this. Through his ministers, Colbert and others, he was wise enough to devote himself during his reign to the consistent encouragement of those arts which make the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries French in the history of taste. Encouragement was the necessary step and this was meted out unstintingly.

The establishment of the Manufactory of the Gobelins in 1667 by royal warrant was epochal in that it became the corner stone about which gathered the creation of every kind of an article of luxury. The leading men of every craft were employed at no matter what expense, the certainty of a continuous market and the exacting demands of craftsmanship and design assuring the quality of production.

By the eighteenth century the Manufactory of the Gobelins had become only one of many centers. Large numbers of skilled men had developed, and workmen from other countries began to be attracted to Paris in increasing numbers as the century wore on. Paris was the artistic capital of Europe. This and the

basic refinement and finish of her workers made her in addition the center of a great export trade, her products being sought for all over Europe wherever taste and fashion reigned.

One of the factors which contributed most to the continued excellence of her furniture was the stringent rules thrown about their craft by the corporation of furniture makers. This was a guild composed of the different members of the trade, but it differed from the modern union in that it was a means of guaranteeing the excellence of the finished product.

From an early time there had been a group of workers in Paris who called themselves *L'Ancienne communauté des huchiers-menuisiers*. In 1743 this ancient organization was replaced by another which went under the name of *La Communauté des Maîtres Menuisiers et ébénistes de la Ville, Fauxbourgs et Banlieue de Paris*. Under this head were organized all the master furniture makers and *ébénistes* of Paris and its surroundings.

A few excerpts from their rules give an interesting sidelight on the standards demanded from their craftsmen. A jury was authorized to visit the workers and if defective or bad workmanship made their pieces prejudicial to the community or to the buyer, the jury was given authority to seize the newly made work. Further, the jury was bound to make "four general yearly visits to all the masters and the widows of this métier, living or having shop or atelier in our city; those who worked on examples of furniture, etc., let it be in oak, walnut, beech, elm, and ebony." Further, "that none can have a shop of the above named profession of furniture making nor work on his own account in his own room or other place unless he be received as a master in the community; and no one will be received without having made, in the house of one of the jury in charge, the masterpiece prescribed according to the rules." Further, "that no one should be able to become a master of this art if he does not profess the Catholic religion, Apostolic and Roman; and if he is not originally French, born our subject; or that he has obtained letters of naturalization properly verified and registered." Further, "each master will be obliged to have his particular mark, the imprints of which will be deposited at the Bureau on a sheet of lead which will be there for that purpose, and that the masters will not deliver any work that they have not marked first, on pain of confiscation and fine. Anyone using this mark for forging a name will be fined and severely pun-

ished, forfeiting his mastership upon second offense." Such rules were made to guard the authenticity of the masters' work. In addition, there were rules which emphasized the necessity for the finest workmanship. One rule is as follows: "As the excellence and solidity of these works consist principally in the proper placing together of the parts, they will be made with such art and the channeling for the sculpture will be so well worked out that the piece would not be altered or weakened by this sculpture; and if these works, so made and well prepared, are found to be injured afterward by the sculptor, who without regard to the general ensemble should take away too much wood from this portion or from any other portion, he shall be answerable therefor to the menuisiers."

In 1776 the corporations in their original form were suppressed. The various organizations were then divided into communities based on the ancient division of the crafts or *métiers*. However, the same rules and customs in general continued.

On the sixteenth of March, 1778, Adam Weisweiler was received into the corporation, giving as his residence the Rue and Fauxbourg S. Antoine. In this section of the city were gathered together by this time a considerable number of *ébénistes* of German origin who had been attracted to Paris by the opportunities for work and by the encouragement to foreigners given by the young Queen, Marie Antoinette. Weisweiler was probably born at Neuweid near Coblenz, and soon after his arrival in Paris must have made an enviable name among his fellow workers, because it was not long before he received special recognition. It is known that he made a considerable number of pieces for the furnishing of the palace of St. Cloud, acquired by the Queen in 1785. One of the pieces made for her now forms part of the collection of the Louvre. Marie Antoinette had presented this piece to a friend and after various vicissitudes it was purchased about 1865 for the Mobilier National, or the National Furniture Collection. Illustrations of it can be found in many books.¹

Particular emphasis is laid upon this piece, because the stretcher which connects and strengthens the four legs is in larger part identical in section with the stretcher of the newly acquired Museum console. The table is smaller in its propor-

¹Molinier, *Le Mobilier au XVIIe et au XVIIIe Siècle*, p. 210.
Hessling, *Die Louis XVI Mobil des Louvres*, Abb. 22.

tions than the console and the stretcher is not so long. The central portion of the stretcher is therefore designed differently, and a basket in ormolu replaces the simple rosette on the Museum piece. Identical also is the manner in which the stretcher is joined to the legs and in both examples it has the same outlining molding of ormolu. The general similarity, the fact that it is signed by the same artist, and the fact that the Museum piece also is of royal provenance suggest the possibility that this too was originally one of a set made for St. Cloud.

The console is of mahogany, decorated with ormolu or gilt bronze and bears the stamp Weisweiler twice upon the plain wood of the back. The top is a slab of white marble, and the front skirt is broken into three panels forming drawer fronts. Around this skirting runs a decoration of ormolu of ornamental design, applied on a narrow banding of black wood which resembles ebony. The legs are channeled, the channels being gilded, and the feet taper gracefully almost to a point. The artist has studied the effect of the ensemble so that the tone of the mahogany and ormolu combine perfectly, and the whole has that quality of charm, that sense of refinement and good breeding which stamp the furniture of the period. Such a piece, with its eminent distinction of line and workmanship, might well have fitted into the surroundings at St. Cloud.

Much simpler is the little *coffret à mariage* (see page 127) which was purchased by the Dudley P. Allen Fund. This, also, is of mahogany with special wood chosen for the panels to show beauty of grain. It has the straight lines and the simplicity of outline which characterize the full Louis XVI style and is decorated with narrow beadings of ormolu which accent the panels and give a happy relief to the mahogany.

The Louis XVI style, so called, really came into being at the end of the Louis XV period. The name of Madame Du Barry has often been associated with its inception. She undoubtedly had much to do with the success finally achieved, although she was perhaps an unconscious instrument in the hands of her architects and furniture makers. The fact remains that in 1765 the Château of Louveciennes was built for her and the new furniture ordered for that château more or less fixed the new style.

About the middle of the eighteenth century the interest in classical art had revived. The finds at Herculaneum and Pompeii, the books of Winckelmann on the classic past, the drawings of Piranesi, the writings of the Comte de Caylus, and the studies made at Rome by Gabriel and other French architects had prepared the way for a reversion from the extravagancies of the rocaille style. The world was tired of the elaboration and intricacy of the curved line and the absurdities which it had sometimes undergone at the hand of some of the minor craftsmen. The time was ripe for a change toward the end of Louis XV's reign and the simpler type of furniture, with many of the lines crossing at right angles, caught the popular fancy. Upon these pieces of far simpler form many classical motifs were employed. In the earlier pieces many varieties of wood were used, but as Louis XVI's reign passed there came a growing demand for the use of mahogany. The architects had prepared the way for the newer furniture, in a certain sense, because the curved lines of the Louis XV styles did not show to so great advantage among the straight and classical moldings of the Louis XVI architecture.

The Museum is indeed fortunate in being able to exhibit permanently two such characteristic examples of the best of the Louis XVI furniture, pieces which combine the perfection of style and the exquisite workmanship which make the furniture of this type remarkable among the products of all time.

W. M. M.

AN OIL PAINTING BY MARY CASSATT

It is interesting to record an anonymous gift of the oil painting, *A Woman Leaning on her Right Hand*, by Mary Cassatt, which is reproduced as the frontispiece of this *Bulletin*. This new acquisition gives an opportunity of judging her work in both oil and pastel, for the Museum has owned since 1920 the beautiful pastel, *La sortie du bain*, presented by J. H. Wade.

The new canvas is a portrait of a young woman, her huge pompadour of blueish-black hair arranged in the fashion of the day. She is wearing a pale blue dress trimmed with lace, and holds a cat in her left hand. The figure sways slightly to the left and the right hand and the tilt of the head give a pleasing and rather unusual composition. The attractive color scheme is completed by the clear gray of the background. The subject

CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART



COFFRET À MARIAGE, FRENCH LOUIS XVI PERIOD
Purchased from the Dudley P. Allen Fund